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A Vocabulary, or collection of words and phrases which have been supposed to be peculiar to the United States of America, to which is prefixed an Essay on the present state of the English language in the United States. Originally published in the memoirs of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences; and now republished with corrections and additions. By John Pickering. Atque, ut latine loquamur, videndum est, ut verba efferamus ea, quæ nemo jure reprehendat. Cic. de Orat. Boston, published by Cummings and Hilliard. 8vo. pp. 206.

It must be granted in praise of learning in this part of our republick, that no inconsiderable efforts have been made to preserve the English language in its purity. In the journals which have preceded our Review, are interspersed occasional speculations in philology, which, as well for adjudging particular words and phrases, as for exciting the attention of scholars to verbal criticism, have had much influence in preserving what was pure in our style, and in recovering it from corruption. With great pleasure we acknowledge the more systematick labours of Mr. Pickering, in the same laudable undertaking. We are fully aware that the publick stands in need of literary guardians, and that it will not answer, in any province of learning, to trust entirely to individual selfgovernment. A wild luxuriance might indeed overspread our literary soil, if left to its natural fertility; but we ought to be able to discern between the innocent and the noxious: and if, when the hand of cultivation is applied, it be directed without skill, what is beautiful may be lamentably marred, and a rank growth of what is gaudy and disgusting, may be forced to a pernicious maturity.

Some of our friends, we believe, have been startled in consequence of too severe an interpretation of Mr. Pickering's remarks in his *Essay*, prefixed to his *Vocabulary*, and have been ready to apprehend, that they were intended, by the author, unreasonably to impoverish the English language. Speaking of the discipline to which it is necessary to submit, in order to acquire and preserve a pure English style, he says:

“It is related of Mr. Fox, that when speaking of his intended History, he said, he would ‘*admit no word into*

his book for which he had not the authority of Dryden.* This determination may perhaps seem, at first view, to have been dictated by too fastidious a taste, or an undue partiality for a favourite author ; but unquestionably, a rule of this sort, adopted in the course of our education, and extended to a few of the best authors, would be the most effectual method of acquiring a good English style. And surely, if Fox found no necessity for any other words than Dryden had used, those writers have little excuse, who take the liberty, not only of using all the words they can find in the whole body of English authors, ancient and modern, but also of making new terms of their own at pleasure. Who shall have a right to complain of scarcity, where that distinguished orator found abundance ? Such standard authors, therefore, should be made the *foundation of our English* ; but as our language, like all others, is constantly though slowly changing, we should also, in order to perfect our style, as we advance to mature age, study those authors of our own time, who have made the older writers their models."

The style of Dryden is full and flowing, and embraces a great compass of expression ; and if Fox were contented to get his vocabulary from Dryden alone, Mr. Pickering concludes, by an argument, *a fortiori*, as the logicians say, in favour of making a few standard authors the foundation of our English.

In Mr. Pickering's Essay several selections are made from the principal English Reviews, which contain indeed very salutary admonitions, but which, taken in their full extent, give an exaggerated picture of the deformity of our English style, on this side the Atlantick. That these censors on subjects of taste and learning, should overrate the amount of our departures from English idiom and expression, it is not surprising ; for such departures, from their very novelty, even if they do not occur frequently, cannot fail to leave a strong impression, and are liable to create a prejudice so deep, that all the faultless diction, and the excellences of style in general, will not atone for such occasional transgression of the laws of *good usage*.

The principal object of Mr. Pickering's work is to collect the words and phrases which have been supposed to be

* Preface to his *History of James the Second*.

peculiar to the *United States*. Incidental to this, and in a manner embraced in it, is the collection of “antiquated words, which were brought to this country by our forefathers, nearly two centuries ago; (some of which were at that day provincial words, in England) and of words to which we have affixed a new signification.

In the course of the vocabulary, it appears from Mr. Pickering’s researches, and from the authorities cited, that a number of words which have been supposed to be peculiar to us, are not indebted for their origin to our invention. Among these is the verb *advocate*, in the sense of *support* or *defend*. But it is highly probable, that, while we are denied, by a late English Lexicographer, the honour of inventing it, we have been the means of raising it to notice, and of introducing it to the favour of Englishmen.

In regard to the words *legislate*, *mission*, (in its diplomatick sense) and perhaps a few others, we believe that all the credit of invention is in our favour. While, therefore, in common with all, who speak the same language, we may suffer for our presumption, when we use words unauthorized by custom; we have, on the other hand, a share in the chances of enriching the English vocabulary, by the use of words which may be found convenient, and which may be gradually introduced by good writers. Our right to make new words, Mr. Pickering says, he does not mean to deny. But we owe it to our reputation, if we would aspire to be ranked among good English scholars, to do it with caution. Vanity may sometimes lead us to imitate those who have acquired an influence, rather from their political rank in the community, than from their literary accomplishments; but it is to the tribunal of learning and taste, that all must ultimately submit.

When we find that words, which have been severely reprobated by those who appear to take the chief cognizance of letters, make their way into the productions of the best authors, we may be ready to think it well enough, that the language should be left to chance; and to imagine that no evil will arise, in this portion of the world, that will not operate its own cure. Innovations in language, in the *United States*, cannot be expected to extend their influence in any great degree, to England; and as far as the criticks of the latter country are conversant with our written productions, we shall not suffer for want of admonition and

censure, when we trespass against established rules. Still our pride is concerned in the knowledge and observance of those rules, and it must be mortified when we are detected in violating them.

Doctor Beattie, after having made a collection of *Scotticisms*, says in one of his letters, written in 1785, "I become every day more and more doubtful of the propriety of publishing it. Our language, (I mean the English) is degenerating very fast; and many phrases which I know to be Scottish idioms, have got into it of late years: so that many of my strictures are liable to be opposed by authorities, which the world accounts unexceptionable."—Possibly the Doctor might have been in an error respecting some of his supposed Scotticisms; while, on the other hand, much is to be allowed for the tendency of the writings of the Scotch and English to acquire a close resemblance, as there became a constantly increasing community of literary labours and productions. The solicitude of Doctor Beattie to write the English language with correctness and purity, is an example of the modesty of another learned Scotchman, besides that which Mr. Pickering cites of the celebrated Doctor Campbell. This solicitude is manifested more than once, in his letters to his literary friends. An instance that we now recollect, is where, besides various other apologies which he makes for his style, he adds, "even provincial improprieties, I know, I am not proof against, though few people have been more careful to keep clear of them." Whatever clemency, therefore, American writers may demand for their faults in the use of words, they cannot claim exemption from the necessity of diligent study of the English language, if they would avoid improprieties and barbarisms.

There is another view, which it becomes us to take of Mr. Pickering's Essay and Vocabulary. It might be supposed, and we believe some persons have too hastily taken up the opinion, that he means to proscribe all words of American origin. Our national prejudices no doubt would revolt against such an undistinguishing and arbitrary decree. But it appears already, from our examination, that he does not deny us the right of making new words. It is one of the principal excellencies of his work, that it enables us to see what words are peculiarly our own; and to find whether they are so much better than any others that could be em-

ployed, or rendered so necessary or convenient from local circumstances, that we choose to persevere in their use; or whether, on the contrary, they are so worthless, or of such doubtful utility, as to induce us to relinquish them, in favour of those which are authorized and established by custom. *Locate*, for example, may be a useful word to denote the surveying and fixing of the boundaries of unsettled lands; but to locate a *court*, to locate a *preacher*, and, what is still worse, to locate a *noise* and locate a *quotation*, meaning in these phrases to point out the place, are expressions that violate the rules of propriety and taste. Such barbarous terms as *Presidential* and *Congressional*, with some others, are equally unnecessary, and offensive to the ear.

It could not be expected that the author of the vocabulary should take upon himself the responsibility of a decision upon new words in all cases: he had discharged his duty, when he had given us the best means in his power for forming a judgment; and had thus afforded us the opportunity to adopt what is necessary or useful, however new, and to guard against needless or pernicious innovations, which many, perhaps unconsciously, had before been promoting.

Different writers and speakers, in this country, have indeed produced a considerable variety of words, that were before unknown; but it is gratifying, on the whole, to find that so small a number of them has been countenanced by our own criticks; and that we have thus been able to preserve to ourselves, in common with the nation from which we descended, the true benefits of the English language. Its identity is in fact as perfect as could be expected, under the circumstances in which we have been placed; and by the timely efforts of our best scholars, among whom Mr. Pickering is pre-eminently deserving of praise, we hope, so far from losing any thing more of our true English, to gain greater favour among the liberal criticks of our parent country.

Besides those words which are of native growth, we have many, particularly of a colloquial kind, which either are now, or were formerly, provincial in England. The laborious and successful endeavours of Mr. Pickering to collect these words, and trace them to their origin, must be highly gratifying to the curiosity of the philologist. Many of

these words, which are not to be found in our common dictionaries, we have been accustomed to hear, in different parts of our country, from infancy; but we were not before aware, that they had so generally been brought hither by our fathers. A few other words, which made a part of the written language of former times, but are now obsolete in England, still seem to be tenacious of their rights. *Tarry*, is one of this class; but we believe it is now seldom used in writing; and, for the most part, the provincial and obsolete words of the English, have here preserved only a hereditary and oral descent.

The changes of meaning which words undergo, and departures from the true and common idioms, are among the perplexing mutabilities of language. So far as these subjects have fallen under Mr. Pickering's notice, we consider his vocabulary and remarks, of very great value. Violations of the genuine idiom, in a country separated from the parent stock, but professing to speak and write the same language, often escape with impunity. They are commonly the result of negligence; sometimes however, of pardonable ignorance. Even where the language is most cultivated, all the vigilance of criticism is requisite to preserve its idiom pure. Affectation of novelty, or ambition for some distinctive peculiarities, is apt to betray a writer into faults of style, which go to fill up the measure of its corruption. Thus language, like every thing else, must submit to the fashion of the times; and the idioms that were once legitimate and chaste, now become spurious and vulgar. The prediction of Addison, that the time would arrive when the style of his papers would be considered quaint, vulgar, or obsolete, has not to any great degree been fulfilled. It was founded in the experience of the past; and fortunately the past was not, in this instance, a type of the future. Changes however, have taken place; but there appears for the most part so much of permanency in the accustomed modes of expression, where the English language is cultivated, that our apprehensions for its safety are perhaps less, than the real danger.

For manifest changes, partly of the meaning of words, and partly of idiom, our readers are referred to—*arrive*, *clever*, *conduct*, *improve*, *likely*, *notify*, and *temper*, among many others to be found in Mr. Pickering's Vocabulary.

If any of those who consult this Vocabulary, conclude that the result is less portentous than the remarks in the Essay led them to apprehend, and that there is little to fear from seemingly trifling innovations in language, let them consider, that, as in almost every thing else, whether of a moral or literary nature, so in language, great effects are produced by slow and almost imperceptible degrees. Many professional gentlemen, and many scholars of respectable rank, will find various deviations from correct English noticed here, which had never before arrested their attention. They will of course be more vigilant in guarding against the same or similar abuses of language. Attention only is requisite to preserve in general the purity of our style ; and afterwards, if we are sometimes involuntarily betrayed into faults and improprieties, they will not be such nor so frequent, as to bring upon us severe reprehension.

From these views of the subject before us, we are bound to acknowledge our gratitude to Mr. Pickering ; and to welcome his appearance before the publick, in so good a cause, as an event highly auspicious, and one which bodes well to American learning. For the abundant authorities which he has produced under words of most importance, and for the accuracy with which the work is executed in every respect, he deserves great commendation.

This "collection of words and phrases," Mr. Pickering remarks, "I do not offer as a perfect list of our real or supposed peculiarities of language, but merely as the beginning of a work, which can be completed only by long and accurate observation, especially of intelligent Americans, who shall have an opportunity of residing in England, and of well-educated Englishmen, who may visit this country." The task is now in his hands ; and before a future edition shall be demanded, we hope he will derive all the aid which can be acquired from the sources he mentions, and from those scholars among ourselves, who think the English language worthy of their study, and whose pride it is to find it written and spoken with propriety. The author is bound to make no apologies for not having accomplished more ; he engaged in an undertaking almost new ; and if his work do not contain every thing which its plan admits, it contains much that is extremely valuable. Variations from idiomatical purity, we should fear will be found to multiply, as Mr. Pickering extends his researches ; and they form a

very interesting part of his work, as far as his inquiries have brought them into notice.

We cannot close these remarks upon Mr. Pickering's Vocabulary, without recommending it to the attentive examination of every American scholar.



A Statistical view of the District of Maine, more especially with reference to the value and importance of its interior, addressed to the consideration of the legislators of Massachusetts, by Moses Greenleaf Esq. Salus publica mea merces. Boston, 1816, Cummings and Hilliard, pp. 154.

THE MEMORIAL OF MARK LANGDON HILL AND OTHERS, TO THE LEGISLATURE OF MASSACHUSETTS, 1816.

An Act concerning the separation of the District of Maine from Massachusetts Proper, and forming the same into a separate and independent State, passed June 19th, 1816.

Politicks have been almost as much abused, by statesmen of modern times, as religion was, by the priests of the dark ages. There was a time, in that gloomy reign of ecclesiastical tyranny, when the sublunary concerns of mankind seemed to be managed, wholly for the benefit of the priesthood. If they desired the acquiescence, or cooperation of the laity, in the execution of any plan, which they had contrived, to enlarge their power, increase their wealth, or administer to their wordly pleasures, it was only necessary, for them strenuously to maintain, (which in such cases they never failed to do,) that the interest of the kingdom of heaven imperiously demanded it. Since the sceptre has been wrested from the hands of the ecclesiasticks, and wielded by laymen, we have to regret, that, in too many instances, statesmen, with no better intentions, have made use of the crafty policy of the monks, and availing themselves of the ignorance and credulity of the people, have succeeded in recommending measures, adapted solely to answer their selfish purposes, and most pernicious to the welfare of the state, by holding up to view some great public benefit, which they undertake to assert will, in some way or other, (no matter how mysterious and inexplicable,) result from the adoption of them.